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Pollard Affair Was Built on a Bedrock of Stupidity

✓ By **WILLIAM PFAFF**

A certain amount of spying is normal among friends. Military attaches, whether they are in friendly countries or hostile, are licensed spies of a sort, useful in that they allow one country to make a prudent judgment of the military capabilities of another.

Diplomats perform an intelligence function in their effort to assess what the government to which they are accredited is up to, and why it does what it does. So, for that matter, do journalists. One of the principal functions of any intelligence agency is systematic collation and cross-reference of what is published in the press.

Step beyond that into the next stage, that of clandestine intelligence, soliciting and running secret agents, and you leave normal international relations for the realm of aggression and conflict. To spy secretly on another country is an aggressive, intrusive act. The Pollard case was an Israeli aggression against the United States—and what is so striking about it is that it was so stupid, given what it risked.

The Pollard case was like the Iran arms fiasco. Each resulted from a profound failure of common sense, as well as a profound indifference to conventional standards of international morality. There seems to have been no weighing whatever of potential benefits against either short-term costs or the long-term damage to international standards.

Nothing Israel could learn from spying on the National Security Agency was worth the blow this case has delivered to the American government's confidence in collaboration with Israel and to the American public's good will toward that country. It is said—some people seem to think it a justification—that Pollard's information allowed Israel to bomb Yasser Arafat's PLO headquarters in Tunisia. So they did, missed Arafat and damaged American interests in a friendly Islamic country.

Nothing in the White House's fanciful secret opening to fancied moderates in Tehran could outweigh the damage done to the United States by revelation of this Administration's duplicity and lack of principle. Nothing can be gained in Central America that justifies the subversion of the rule of law within the United States and the flagrant defiance of international law that have taken place.

And it was not "rogues" or "cowboys" who did these things, but people acting within the values prevalent in these two governments. Israel has been taught expedience by 40 years of threat, tension, terrorism and war. The Israelis were fools to do what they did, but one reason they behaved as fools was that constant struggle has undermined their moral footing. There is no such excuse for Americans.

The usual occasion for one country to establish an effective espionage operation in another comes when citizens of the other country want support for domestic political objectives of their own, or rebel against the political values of their own society. The majority of Soviet defectors seem to have been politically motivated. Col. Oleg Penkovsky offered himself to the West. Dissident French generals in Algeria at the time of that country's war for independence wanted the Central Intelligence Agency to help them against Gen. Charles de Gaulle and offered information to the United States in exchange. The same kind of thing is commonplace in the relation of Third World countries to the major powers.

The Cambridge spies in Britain—Kim Philby and at least three others—were not mercenaries. They had come to believe that Britain itself required revolution and socialism. George Blake became a double agent because he had become convinced, in prison in North Korea, that the Soviet Union was a more just society than Britain. American spies for the Soviets seem, on the other hand, to have been mercenaries—those we have discovered, at least.

The Pollard case falls into neither category. Jonathan Jay Pollard and his wife neither rejected the United States nor, it seems, were motivated by money. Jonathan Pollard was an idealistic Zionist, "raised with the notion," he wrote in December, in a letter published in the Jerusalem Post, "that each and every Diaspora Jew has an absolute obligation to act as one of the stones, so to speak, which comprise the modern-day outer battlement of Zion," and also convinced "that the strengthening of Israel would unquestionably improve America's strategic position throughout the Middle East. In other words, Israel's gain would in no way be America's loss—quite the contrary."

The blame in the Pollard affair lies less with Pollard than with those who exploited him, cynically so, offering cynical excuses afterwards, still apparently unable to grasp the enormity of the damage they had done to the interests of their country and to civilized standards of international conduct. It is the stupidity, not the knavery, which is so disturbing.

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